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THE SCRIPTURE READINGS

A STATEMENT OF THE FACTS CONNECTED THEREWITH.

Misrepresentations Corrected—Not a Roman Catholic Scheme, but suggested and Carried Out by Protestants.

LETTERS FROM REV. PRINCIPAL CAVEN AND DR. DEWART.

Herewith will be found letters on the subject of the Scripture Readings from two of the most prominent clergymen in Canada. The letter of Dr. Dewart, editor of the *Christian Guardian*, deals with the origin of the volume of selections. It brings out very clearly the facts that the suggestion came first from synods, Presbyteries, Conferences, and Teachers' Associations, and that a large joint committee consisting of clergymen and laymen from all denominations and political parties approved the selections, after they had been first approved by a representative sub-committee. Dr. Dewart deals, in his characteristically incisive style, with the objections made against the principle of using selections instead of the "whole Bible."

Rev. Principal Caven, speaking also as a non-partisan, says that the attack upon the Minister of Education in respect of these Readings is "such as no exigencies of party warfare can justify." He also proves that the origin of the Readers was Protestant and non-sectarian, and that the Minister, in issuing the book, "was but giving effect to the strongly expressed wishes of the Churches and the teachers." Dr. Caven then defends the selections themselves. The letters were published in the *Globe*, November 27th, 1886.

From Rev. Principal Caven.

SIR,—The Minister of Education is attacked from various quarters in regard to the book of "Scripture Readings" for the use in the Public Schools. This attack seems to me quite groundless, and such as no exigencies of party warfare can justify. I am certainly not anxious to intervene in the political conflict, but I think it my duty to make a brief statement regarding these Readings.

The Education Department, in authorizing selections of Scripture, acted in conformity with representations made to the Department by the Churches of Ontario and by the Provincial Teachers' Association. A large deputation of the Church of England and of the Methodist and Presbyterian Churches submitted to the Attorney-General a resolution of which the following is part:—

"That this conference pledges itself to press upon the Attorney-General the making of the reading of the Holy Scriptures by the children and teacher . . . an obligatory exercise at the opening of the Public Schools of Ontario, the passage of Holy Scripture to be read each day to be prescribed by the Department in conformity with the recommendations of the Committee of this Conference, or some other representative of the various Churches of Ontario, etc."

The Teachers resolved:—

"That the reading of selected portions of Scripture as a part of the regular daily exercises of the school, would be a material aid to teachers in the discharge of their duties in respect to moral training," and "that the Educational Department do make a suitable selection of Scripture readings for the schools under its charge."

A selection of readings was accordingly made, and before receiving authorization was submitted to a large joint committee of the Churches, each member of the committee had a copy sent to him for examination in advance. When the committee met, its first action was to approve of the principle of a book of Scripture readings; afterwards free and general expressions of opinion regarding the proposed selection took place, and a sub-committee, representing the several Churches, was appointed to examine the selections carefully in detail. The writer of this letter, while not a member of the sub-committee, was present at the meeting of the general committee and knows what was done. The Minister in issuing this maligned book was but giving effect to the strongly expressed wishes of the Churches and the teachers. I am not here arguing for the use of selections in preference to the use of the entire Bible, but stating the circumstances under which this selection received approval; and it will thus be seen how little ground there is for accusing the Department of proceeding in opposition to, or in ignorance of, the opinion of the Churches.

The regulations approved in 1884 do not require "the reading of the Holy Scriptures" by the children and teachers, which I think the committee of the Churches desired, and which seems to me decidedly preferable to reading by the teachers alone; and to this extent effect has not been given to the views of the Church Committee; but in regard

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to the principle of selections, and the main features of this selection, the Minister of Education is sustained by the representatives of the Congregational, Methodist, Episcopal, and Presbyterian Churches.

It is scarcely necessary, therefore, to say that the **Scripture Readings were not selected by Archbishop Lynch, nor under his direction.** The draft seems to have been sent to him in common with all the gentlemen composing this large committee above referred to, and the Archbishop suggested the harmless, if unnecessary, change of "which" into "who" in the Lord's prayer; further than this **the hand of the Archbishop was not applied.**

Have those who assert that selections acceptable to the Church of Rome have been made ever examined the book? Have they any conception of the consequences of what they are saying? Are they prepared to admit that selections embracing a considerable part of both Testaments, and regarded, presumably, by the able men who gave the final revision as exhibiting fairly the teachings of the Bible, are an inadequate basis for Protestantism? If the Archbishop of Toronto entirely approves of the selections I am delighted to hear it; for **in them I can find every doctrine of my faith distinctly exhibited.**

It was further alleged, if my memory serves me, that selections were made which should not give offence to Agnostics; but **it will hardly be expected that I should refute this absurd proposition.**

An able journal in this city, which cannot be suspected of undue partiality towards the Minister, was pleased to say, "The Minister of Education is to be congratulated upon having adopted for use in the Common Schools a series of readings from the Old and New Testaments, together with a brief form of prayer. . . The work has been prepared with the greatest care, and cannot fail to commend itself to parents."*

My object in writing this letter, as already said, is not to defend selections of Scripture for use in schools, nor to endorse in every particular the compilation in question, but **to express my sincere condemnation of all attempts to discredit Mr. Ross by misrepresenting facts which are well known to many ministers and laymen in all the Churches.** I would equally bear testimony on behalf of the opponents of the Ontario Government should their action have been in question. No Government can complain of fair and honest criticism, however searching; but **when public men strive to do right, and to follow the best sentiment of the community in its most authentic expression (as Mr. Ross has done in the matter of this book), they are entitled, I think, to expect that those who have prompted their action, and as it were pushed them forward, shall not without emphatic protest allow that action to become the ground of party attack.**

WM. CAVEN.

Toronto, 26th Nov.

* *The Mail.*

From Dr. Dewart.

SIR.—As many incorrect and misleading statements have been published and circulated respecting the "Scripture Readings" issued by the Education Department of Ontario, a brief presentation of the main facts in the history of the matter, and of the reasons which justify such selections, will be only an act of justice to the representatives of the Protestant Churches, who approved of this way of providing Scriptural readings in the Public Schools. It has been alleged in various forms that these "Scripture Readings" were the scheme or work of Archbishop Lynch, and that their use is equivalent to a rejection of the Bible, which, it is said, has been dishonored and dethroned by this volume. As one of the Protestant Ministers who approved of the publication of such a volume, and who took part in the preparation and revision of these "Scripture Readings," I feel bound, on behalf of myself and the other ministers concerned, to repudiate the unfair and incorrect construction that has been put upon the adoption of this method of supplying the demand of the Churches for more religious instruction in the schools. Much of what has been written against the "Scripture Readings" I cannot but regard as an attempt to arouse unwarranted prejudice, and to mislead the public mind as to the aim, character, and tendency of the volume under discussion.

A simple statement of the facts of the case, the circumstance that led to the action taken, and the names and character of the gentlemen who approved of this course and helped to carry it out, ought to convince all candid Protestants that there is no ground whatever for the charge that the Bible has been dishonored to gratify Archbishop Lynch and the Roman Catholics.

The Anglican and Presbyterian Synods, and some of the Methodist Conferences, passed resolutions recommending more general and regular reading of the Scriptures in the Public Schools; and these bodies appointed deputations to press this request upon the attention of the Ontario Government. The main point urged by them was that, instead of the reading of the Scriptures in the schools being optional, it should be made obligatory. These deputations met as a united committee and agreed upon the resolution which they should present to the Government. Then, as a united body, they held a conference with the Attorney-General. The joint resolution agreed upon closed with these words:—

And that this Conference press upon the Government the necessity for a return to the Scriptural and moral instruction contained in the first series of National Readers, issued by the Education Department for use in the Public Schools of Ontario, or of some similar religious instruction.

The Teachers' Provincial Association

sometime after this recommended "the reading of selected portions of Scripture as a part of the daily school exercise," and to carry out this idea the Association further recommended that the Education Department do make "a suitable selection of Scripture readings for the schools under its charge."

In response to these appeals the **Minister of Education** arranged to have prepared a **book of Scripture lessons** to be read in all the Public Schools. Having first submitted a copy of the proposed system of lessons to each, he called together the members of the deputations from the Churches, and

Submitted the Proposal to Them.

After full consideration of the whole question, this conference of ministers approved of the plan of a volume of Scripture selections as the best method practicable, and appointed a sub-committee of their members to aid in preparing and revising the proposed book of lessons. **This sub-committee carefully performed this duty.** The book itself is the best evidence of the manner in which the work was done. It has been justly claimed by the sub-committee "that the volume of selections was intended to be thoroughly representative of every portion of the Scriptures, whether of a moral or doctrinal character." The selections have met with general approval, even *The Mail* congratulated the **Minister of Education on having adopted this series of readings** for use in the Common Schools, and warmly commended the work. That was before the idea of representing it as a dishonour to the Bible and a blow to Protestantism was thought out.

I want specially to call attention to the fact that not only the sub-committee of revision, whose names have been often mentioned, approved of preparing these Scripture selections, but

THE LARGE JOINT COMMITTEE OF PROTESTANT MINISTERS AND LAYMEN,

representing not only the three Churches already named, but also Baptist and Congregational ministers, approved of this course, which the public are now asked by certain parties to believe is the adoption of a Roman Catholic policy that rejects and dishonours the Bible.

Here are the names of the members of the joint committee of representatives to whom the proof-sheets of the readings were sent, and who, at their meeting approved of the preparation and publication of a book of Scripture Readings :—

The Methodist Church.—Rev. Dr. Rose, Rev. Dr. Sutherland, Rev. Dr. Dewart, Rev. S. J. Hunter, Rev. W. S. Blackstock, Rev. E. Roberts, Rev. J. M. Simpson, Mr. John Macdonald, Mr. R. Walker, Mr. Warring Kennedy, and Mr. Justice Rose.

Church of England.—Very Rev. Archdeacon Boddy, M.A.; Rev. Provost Body, M.A.; Rev. John Langtry, M.A.; Rev. J. P. Lewis, Rev. I. Middleton, B.A.; Rev. J. W. Beck, Rev. A. Sanson, Hon. G. W. Allan, Mr. N. W. Hoyles, B.A.; Mr. C. R. W. Biggar, M.A.; Mr. G. B. Kirkpatrick, Mr. A. McLean Howard, and J. A. Worrel, B.C.L.

The Presbyterian Church.—Rev. Dr. Laing, Rev. Dr. Gregg, Rev. Principal Grant, Rev. Principal Caven, Rev. H. M. Parsons, Rev. S. Lyle, Rev. W. T. McMullen, Charles Davidson, Mr. J. L. Blaikie, Mr. James McLellan, Q.C., Mr. H. Cassels, Dr. Macdonald.

The Congregational Church.—Rev. H. P. Powis, Rev. John Burton, B.D.

The Baptist Church.—Rev. Dr. Castle.

All these gentlemen were not present at the meeting of the conference that approved of the proposed book, but nearly all the ministers named were there, and I believe the proof-sheets were sent to every member of the different deputations, so that none of them were left in ignorance of what was proposed, or without an opportunity of objecting.

And yet, in the face of these facts respecting the origin, the approval, and objects of the book, the Protestants of Ontario are asked to believe that these Scripture readings were an anti-Protestant movement, designed to dishonour the Bible and banish it from the Public Schools. This could only be true on the supposition that this conference of Protestant Ministers was knowingly faithless and disloyal to the Bible, or too stupid to understand the purport and effect of the course of action of which they approved. It will be impossible to persuade the people of Ontario that they were either the one or the other. The Protestant Ministers who approved of the proposed readings are certainly as loyal to the Bible, and as jealous of its honour as the most blatant of their partisan assailants. For myself and the Christian gentlemen with whom I was associated, I fling back the clap-trap appeals and partisan misrepresentations, as mean and slanderous aspersions on the character of men who were honestly and intelligently endeavouring to promote a fuller knowledge of the life-giving truths of the Bible among the youth of the country.

I confess I have been surprised at the weakness and unfairness of the appeal made against the Bible selections, and the desperate efforts to make the teachers believe that they were slighted and ill-used in the matter. **If the Scriptures are to be read in the Schools at all, some selections must be made.** Only a brief portion of Scripture can be read at any one time. It will not be denied that some portions of Scripture are better adapted to instruct and edify children and youth than others. Somebody must make the selection. Can it be denied that selections chosen in the way these selections were made are more likely to be chosen judiciously than if the selection is left to the hurried impulse of the moment?

I am glad to learn from a recent statement of the Minister of Education that since the issue of the Readings, the Scriptures are much more extensively read in the Schools than formerly. This must be gratifying to every Protestant who is not warped by some perverting influence. The object sought by the Churches is evidently being accomplished. A great step forward has been achieved.

There has been a disingenuous play on the phrase "The Bible in the School," as if it meant only the Old and New Testament bound in one volume and kept within the walls of the school-house. By "The Bible in the School," I understand the truths of the Bible read and taught in the school as part of the daily exercises.

It would intrude too much upon your space for me to reply to the cavilling objections that have been urged in the columns of the *Mail* against these Scripture Readings. The mere statement of most of these cavillings reveals their essential weakness and unfairness. But I may be permitted to ask:—Is the more extensive reading of the enlightening truths of Holy Scripture in our Ontario Schools something

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that should rouse the opposition of Protestants as if it were a calamity to be deplored? Is the form in which the Scriptures are bound more sacred and important than the spiritual truths which enlighten the mind and purify the heart? **Does the Church of England dishonour the Bible** when she inserts in her Prayer-Book select lessons to be read in the public services? **Does the Bible Society dishonour the Bible** when it publishes parts of the Scriptures in separate volumes for reasons of economy and convenience? Were the different books of Scripture dishonoured, or robbed of their authority and spiritual power, in the time before they were all bound together in our modern form, in one volume? Does the selection of certain Scriptural lessons by the International Sunday-School Committee, and their publication on separate fly-leaves, dishonour the Bible? Are the Bible truths given in these "Scripture Readings" any less the Word of God. "quick and powerful" because they are published in this form?

I am satisfied to leave every honest man to answer these questions for himself.

In view of the facts and arguments which I have hastily named, and others which it would occupy too much space to state here, I do not hesitate to say that, if the other grounds on which it is alleged that Protestantism is in danger in this Province are as weak, as flimsy, and as futile as what has been urged about the "Scripture Readings" in the Public Schools, they are not likely to secure the confidence of candid and intelligent people.

E. H. DEWART,

Toronto, Nov. 25, 1886.